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Prologue

[image]

Light sleet splattered against a large glass window, beneath which a silver queen sat with brows furrowed and emerald green eyes focused elsewhere. "I knew it'd be cold, but I wasn't expecting ice!" she fretted aloud, glancing behind her.

A tiny, fluffy, silver tabby kitten stared back, their snow-white paws shifting in excitement. "Mama! Is it time yet? Time to go on our adventure?"

The large molly sighed and plastered a warm smile across her face. "Yes it is, Myrtlekit. It's going to be very chilly, but I trust you can handle it?"

Myrtlekit puffed out her fuzzy white chest. "I can, I promise!" They smiled their own smile, wide and toothy, and her heart glowed when her mother laughed in response. "Don't you worry, Mama. I'll be strong just like you, like a warrior cat!"

"I'm sure you will," she purred, shaking the nerves from her pelt and scooping Myrtlekit into her jaws. "You'll be a big strong warrior in no time, just like me and your dad."

Myrtlekit squirmed in excitement. Tonight was the night they'd meet her father, and most importantly, learn his name. "Does he have a warrior name like you do?"

Her mother nodded and started towards a cat flap in the back door of the house, one that she'd assured that the housefolk she was denning with had left unlocked. "His name will fit him, though. All warriors have names that fit them perfectly. Can you guess why I'm named Silverstreak?"

Myrtlekit braced herself as the pair pushed through the flap and out into the icy-cold shower, suppressing a shiver and pretending that they didn't already miss the warm den. "B-because you're gray-

colored! And you're the fastest cat in the whole world, so you run so fast you look like a streak of silver."

Silverstreak nodded, crouching down and leaping over the fence that bordered the small yard she had called home for the past four moons. She broke into a light canter, crossing the small field that separated the Twolegplace into halves.

Long, uncut grass wet with freezing rain didn't waste time soaking Silverstreak and Myrtlekit's long coats. Myrtlekit whimpered, trying to curl up into a tighter ball. "How come you're not cold?"

"I *am* cold," Silverstreak said, making her way in between two houses and down the patch of lawn that divided them. "My fur doesn't get wet very easily, though. Yours will be like that too when you grow up."

"What? Why? And why isn't my fur like that now?"

Silverstreak made it to the road, looking both ways before crossing the rain-blackened asphalt. "Well, the water slides right off of my pelt because I was born in FloodClan. Your father's pelt is the same, because he was born in MireClan. Our Clans are across the river from one another, which means we all swim a lot."

"Oh! Because you swim, your fur needs to be waterproof!" Myrtlekit meowed.

"That's right. Whenever you shed all of your kitten fur in a few moons, you'll have a long, shiny, sleek coat just like us."

Silverstreak was nearing the edge of Twolegplace now, at the top of a hill that sloped down towards a bubbling river. Myrtlekit piped up again, "Why aren't you in FloodClan? Or MireClan, with Dad?"

Silverstreak paused atop the hill, continuing her walk down to the river after a moment of quiet. "Well... FloodClan and MireClan aren't very good friends with each other," she said, "They fight a lot over who gets to live where. I wasn't supposed to love your dad, but no matter what, I loved him and I always will. But that didn't stop our clans from fighting, and I didn't want you to be hurt while you

were in my belly."

Myrtlekit was still confused. "Your Clan would hurt me even though I was in your belly?"

Silverstreak paused at the riverbank. The sleet was falling harder now, and it was getting more difficult to see. "Oh, StarClan no. They would never have hurt you. They just didn't know that you were with me yet, and I didn't tell them because I didn't want them to stop your father from meeting you. Speaking of..."

Silverstreak slipped into the river at an angle, paddling with the current and shielding Myrtlekit from the worst of the splashing water with her own body. However, it was loud and cold and dark, and the kit was scared. They wailed, paws flailing and kicking. Silverstreak gritted her teeth.

"It's okay! Look, there he is!"

She hooked her claws into the opposite riverbed, hoisting Myrtlekit out of the water. Another cat grabbed their scruff and pulled her free. She cried out again.

Silverstreak was out of the water in a flash, taking Myrtlekit back and setting them down to groom the cold water from her fur. She was trembling and miserable. "I wanna go home!"

Her mother shook her head, a laugh escaping her jaws. "We're almost there! Look, say hello!"

Myrtlekit didn't want to look. She was cold, wet, and rather furious at the uncomfortable circumstance she was in.

Silverstreak chuckled again. "I'm sorry," she said to the strange tom, "I wasn't expecting sleet and neither was Myrtlekit. They're usually much more excitable than this."

Myrtlekit jumped when a new voice uttered a response.

"Silverstreak... Silverstreak, w-we can't do this."

Myrtlekit looked up, eyes squinted against the driving sleet. They

couldn't make out a clear figure through the inky blackness and pouring ice, but she could tell that this cat was the one Silverstreak said was her father. *But why is his voice shaking?*

There was a long and heavy pause following his words. Silverstreak was stiff as stone, standing over Myrtlekit. They looked up at the blurry form of her mother, caught off guard by an expression she had never seen from her before.

"What do you mean?" Silverstreak said slowly. "We agreed to meet here. You wanted to meet her. We were going to bring her home tonight, we *agreed*—"

"Things have changed!" he snapped. Myrtlekit flinched with Silverstreak. "Y-you've spent these past moons cooped up as a kittypet, so no wonder you forgot the Code!"

Silverstreak drew her ears back. Her green eyes narrowed into a glare. "The code? I- are you serious? I won't even mention how I was raising a kit— *our* kit— while I was 'cooped up' as a kittypet. What I don't understand is why the Code matters now, but why it didn't matter when we were sneaking around and you got me pregnant!"

The tom gawked for a moment before shaking his head and snarling in exasperation. "That was just a fling! It didn't mean anything, and I didn't... I wasn't *trying* for a kit! It was just stupid fun, nothing more. Come on, you can't seriously believe—"

"I can't believe *you*!" Silverstreak snarled, her hackles tall against the soaking rain. "You asked me— no, you practically *begged* me to go to Twolegplace so that our daughter would be safe!"

"I didn't think you'd actually come back!" he snapped, head ducked and teeth bared.

Silverstreak's jaw was hanging in disbelief. Myrtlekit could feel the indignation rolling from her in waves. They were confused, and scared. She glanced at her father and flattened their ears. *I can fix this! I can make them stop fighting, he just.... he hasn't talked to me yet!*

Fighting against the fear that welled like a dark pit in her stomach, Myrtlekit crawled towards the bristling tom. They plastered a warm smile across her face and put a white paw on his foreleg. "H-hi! I'm Myrtlek—"

With a startled grunt, they were bowled over, rolling a couple times before stopping at her mother's paws. Through the shock, Myrtlekit could feel a warm liquid running down her face, then suddenly, a searing pain across her nose and down her cheek. She wailed in pain, choking out a fearful sob. Myrtlekit pawed at the painful gash across their face, trying in vain to make it stop hurting.

Silverstreak was a blur, barreling into the tom and digging long claws into his shoulders. He yowled, startled, before snarling a battle-cry.

Myrtlekit couldn't look away. Through the fear, she was in awe of her mother's strength. She *was* like a streak of silver; claws flying wildly but meeting their mark every time, and eyes blazing viridescent. Compared to Myrtlekit's father, she was huge. *Go, Mama!*

In only a few more swift moves, she had him pinned on his back with a large white paw on his chin, pressing his head into the squelching mud. "How dare you call yourself a warrior!? You preach the Code then attack a little kit, *your daughter!*"

He struggled against her weight, a growl in his throat. "I don't just call myself a warrior, I call myself the *best* warrior! Don't you see!? While you've been gone living the easy life, I've been serving my Clan like a *real* cat! I have no daughter! *I am not a traitor!* I'm the best MireClan has to offer, and I can't risk my position because of some stupid *mistake*!"

Silverstreak loosened her grip. "That's what this is about? Your rank? You sniveling, *worthless* tom. I don't know what I saw in you. You are worse than dirt, I am ashamed I even spared you a glance, you.... you *pathetic*—"

The air was knocked from her with a sharp kick to the belly. Silverstreak barely had time to react before he was at her throat,

biting down so hard Myrtlekit could've sworn she heard his teeth clack against one another.

He forced her back and down, claws ravaging her bloodied silver coat. She scratched helplessly at his face, her eyes rolling back and meeting Myrtlekit's. Through blood, she choked out one last word, *"FloodClan—"*

A wet, muffled *crack* silenced her forever. Myrtlekit stood still. Time stood still. The sleet poured harder and harder, mixing with the pool of blood that was growing around her mother. The tom finally let go after one more shake for good measure. He raised his head slowly, eyes flashing.

Yellow, Myrtlekit thought dully. *His eyes are yellow.*

She stood frozen, barely registering that he was trembling as hard as she was. He muttered beneath his breath, words like *'found her like that'* and *'rogue attack.'* Myrtlekit shrunk back when he turned to her.

For a brief moment she hoped he had forgotten that she was there.

But then he lunged towards her, bloodied claws outstretched and jaws agape in a killer snarl.

Myrtlekit practically fell over herself trying to get away. She tried to ignore that it wasn't just the rain that soaked her paws and slipped her up. She tried to ignore that he wasn't chasing her, and was just sitting slumped over, watching her run.

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Myrtlekit couldn't see where she was running. The ground was marshy, and the mud sucked at her paws, and the sleet was so relentless that she believed she was drowning.

Suddenly, a glimmer caught her eye; a glimmer that they felt themself hone in on with her entire being. It was a dragonfly, with iridescent wings that shifted through the colors of the rainbow like stained glass. Myrtlekit couldn't see anything else besides the dragonfly just ahead of her, barely out of reach. *Just a few more*

bounds and I can get it, she felt, making one last leap.

However, the moment the tips of her claws touched the dragonfly, it was gone. Myrtlekit did not land on solid ground. Instead, her paws plunged straight down, and Myrtlekit was swept into frigid, bubbling darkness.

•~*~•

Silverstreak (she/her) and Myrtlekit (she/they). art by me.

☙ | FloodClan; Leafbare

[image]

ALLEGIANCES

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• **Leader** — Willowstar ; massive, silvery-blue, classic tabby molly with long, flowing fur and greenish-blue eyes. *(she/her)*

• **Deputy** — Rippleskip ; lanky white tom with marbled silver stripes and very pale blue eyes. *(they/he)*

• **Medic** — Duckstem ; brown tortoiseshell molly speckled with tawny, black, and ginger spots and amber eyes. *(she/they)*

WARRIORS

• **Cresspetal** — pale silver molly with teal eyes. *(she/her)*

• **Dewdaze** — dark gray molly with lighter specks and greenish-blue eyes. *(she/her)*

• **Goldencrest** — large golden tom with a longer ridge of fur on his back, a scarred belly, and yellow-green eyes. *(he/him)*

• **Lushtail** — small, brown agouti molly with a long, fluffy tail and green eyes. *(she/her)*

• **Martenbeard** — dark cinnamon tabby tom with a lighter chin, chest, belly, and paws and amber eyes. *(he/him)*

• **Shellchime** — dilute cream tortoiseshell tom with a white chin and toes and pale hazel eyes. *(they/he)*

• **Storkwing** — big, fluffy, white tom with berry-stained paws and yellow eyes. *(he/him)*

• **Stormspill** — tall black tom with sleek fur and dark blue eyes. *(he/him)*

• **Toadthroat** — brown tabby tom with black and brown stripes and dark hazel eyes. *(he/him)*

• **Tundrapad** — muscular white molly with gray tabby spots, shredded folded ears, and light blue eyes. *(she/her)*

• **Voleshadow** — black and brown tortoiseshell cat with hazel eyes. *(they/them)*

APPRENTICES

n/a

QUEENS & KITS

Plumrose — muscular red tabby molly with thick fur, folded ears, and brown eyes. *(she/her)*

* ***Pansykit —*** *small, stocky molly with thick white fur, red tabby spots, red folded ears, and light blue eyes.* (she/her)

* ***Elderkit —*** *tall black kitty with sleek fur and dark blue eyes.* (they/she)

Charapelt — blue and ginger broken mackerel torbie molly with blue eyes. *(they/she)*

* ***Sunkit —*** *big, fluffy golden tom with blue eyes.* (he/him)

* ***Poplarkit —*** *light gray broken mackerel tabby kit with dark green eyes.* (they/them)

* ***Kitekit —*** *small chocolate tom with a white crest and speckles, and light blue eyes.* (he/him)

Lotusglow — fluffy albino molly with lavender-shaded eyes. *(they/she)*

* ***Iriskit —*** *large, fluffy, brown chocolate tabby with a white mane and paws and greenish-hazel eyes.* (she/her)

Hazelkit — dark chocolate point molly with spiky fur, overgrown black claws, and hazel eyes. *(she/they)* ****guardian is Troutrush**

ELDERS

• **Troutrush** — old, muscular, battle-scarred ruddy pointed tom with a graying face and blind milky-white eyes. *(he/him)*

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[image]

Willowstar (she/her). art by me.

Chapter 1

[image]

Myrtlekit's silver pelt felt heavy with ice. On the riverbank they trembled, body numb with cold. They fought to keep her eyes open, knowing deep down that if she fell asleep now then they wouldn't wake up. *Unless I'm already dead?*

The last thing Myrtlekit remembered was the pitch black current dragging her body through the river as if she were a piece of prey. Perhaps that was the transport to the afterlife. The place she was laying certainly *looked* heavenly.

The ground was smooth and white, glittering beneath a sky pale with dawn light. Flakes drifted from the air, dancing downwards silently as if the stars themselves were falling from the night to leave the sky empty, to make space for the sun.

And the air was crisp, cold, and still. There was no breeze to shake the trees, which were laden with the same strange fallen starlight that blanketed the land. There was no birdsong to indicate any life whatsoever, just the gurgling of the river flowing by. Myrtlekit was dizzy with exhaustion, but the icy water was unbearably cold and biting, and they knew she needed to move somewhere warmer. *Mama won't be able to see me if I'm halfway in the river,* Myrtlekit thought deliriously, hope flaring like a warm ember in their chest.

Their body felt like a lump of gristle when she shifted her weight, and their muscles screamed in protest as she forced their thin legs to heave herself up to standing. Myrtlekit found that it was hard to focus their eyes, she was trembling so much. Tentatively, she took a step forward. Then two, and more, until they were trudging their way up the pebbly riverbank that was hardened by a thin layer of ice. The cold bit at her numb paw pads, which felt hard as the rocks she was making her way over.

Myrtlekit stumbled up and into the cold starlight blanket, which rose up to meet their belly. Tears welled in her eyes as they forced

their way through the freezing stuff, quietly sobbing in frustration as it began to clump into their long fur and slow her down more and more. They were dizzy with exhaustion by the time she made it to the middle of the snowy meadow, and the stars were falling more thickly than before.

As the sun crested the horizon, the whiteness began to burn Myrtlekit's eyes, dismay weighing her down with the stuff that clumped into her fur. *I can't see anymore!* They despaired. Her whiskers drooped with ice and made her muzzle hurt, and at this point she couldn't feel her nose, paws, or ears. The light was blinding, and their body was heavy, and they couldn't feel her limbs.

Defeat made Myrtlekit slump into the ground, and their eyes finally closed with exhaustion. As stars fell onto her pelt and began to build into a thicker and thicker layer, they began to feel warm. *A blanket,* Myrtlekit purred to themself. Warmth enveloped her. *Silverstreak found me!* They were delirious with joy, safe beneath the weight that was building on top of her body, and finally allowed herself to sleep.

•~*~•

"I'll mark the meadow, Rippleskip!" Tundrapad called, casting a glance towards the white and silver-striped deputy. He waved his plumy tail in acknowledgement.

Must've snowed a lot, the massive molly thought absentmindedly, padding along the pebbly riverbank that marked the edge of the boundary between FloodClan and MireClan territory. *What a beautiful day!* Tundrapad marveled at the snow that blanketed the world. The sight of it never got old; the way it coated the earth and glimmered like starlight. A purr rumbled in her throat as she skirted the meadow and thoroughly marked the border. *I'm gonna jump in the snow once I'm done! I'll catch up to Rippleskip later!*

As she circled the meadow back to where she started, Tundrapad whipped away from the river and flounced through the snow. It crunched deliciously beneath her massive white paws, and her curled gray tail wagged happily over her back. She felt like a kit

again, *mrrp*ing with glee every time she hit the ground. With a startled shout, however, her paws caught on a new weight beneath the snow, and she tumbled over it.

"There wasn't a stone there before!" Tundrapad wondered aloud, turning to the spot where she tripped. "Wonder how it got there..."

Curiously she trotted up to the lump in the snow and began to uncover it. She squinted at the shape, the strange texture of this rock confounding her. That was, until she saw it moving. *No, not moving... breathing!*

Tundrapad dug like she never had before, searching for the face of the small creature she'd tripped over. In no time she uncovered the kit's body, stiff as ice. Theur nose and ears were blue and cold, and a small smile was on their face. She reeled in horror.

"RIPPLESKIP!" She shrieked, loud as she could manage. As she waited, Tundrapad curled her large body around the form of the kitten, urging them awake with rough laps of her tongue. *Lick the fur the wrong way,* she remembered. She'd had to warm her little sister up like this when she fell into the river one time.

Snow crunched as Rippleskip sprinted towards Tundrapad, icy blue eyes wide with terror. Tundrapad looked at him, her darker blue eyes wet with tears. "A kit!" she whispered her horror. Rippleskip gawked, ears flat against his skull. "I'll go warn Duckstem," he said, normally soft voice edged with urgency. Tundrapad nodded, not watching to see them leave. She nosed the kit's neck, and gently grasped their scruff. Tundrapad didn't need to strain to pick them up; they were as light as a long-dead vole.

The stocky white and gray she-cat sped through the tracks that Rippleskip left behind. She couldn't afford to stumble through snow now. Her folded gray ears were angled backwards as cold wind whipped her face, and with dismay Tundrapad remembered that she had to cross the river to make it to FloodClan's camp.

Tundrapad whispered apologies as she slipped into the quiet water, doing her best to keep the kitten's body out of the water. They stirred slightly, a feeble groan escaping their lungs. Tundrapad's

heart hammered in her chest as she waded out of the river and continued her sprint.

"Hey, little cat!" she purred through the mouthful of the kit's scruff. "Try not to fall asleep, m'kay? I know you're probably sleepy, but I need you to stay awake to greet my Clanmates!"

The kit made a small sound of exhausted acknowledgement, and was silent the rest of the run there. The second Tundrapad burst through the low, woven, reed-and-willow arch that marked the entrance to FloodClan camp, she was bombarded with noise.

"Get them to the nursery," a small brown tortoiseshell ordered, herbs clutched in her jaws. Tundrapad nodded and weaved around the small crowd of cats that began to surround them, moving quickly towards a low spreading bush nestled between reeds and cattails. She was met with a *mrrow* of confusion when she slipped down into the burrow beneath the leaves, greeting a thick-set orange tabby she-cat who had two kittens curiously staring, wide-eyed, behind her.

The brown tortoiseshell pushed past, taking the kitten from Tundrapad and nudging her in between the new she-cat's large white forepaws.

"D-Duckstem?" she stuttered in confusion, at first not understanding what had been given to her. When the realization dawned, however, she pulled the kit close to her chest and began to furiously lick her pelt.

"Sorry, Plumrose," Duckstem said. In a few deft movements she divided the herbs up and rationed them out. "Emergency. You know I don't have a hint of motherly instinct that'd be of any help."

Plumrose trembled with anxiety as the silver kitten's breathing began to slow. She pressed her folded ear against their chest, relieved to hear the steady pulse of their heart. "They're okay, thank StarClan. Now, can you *please* tell me what's happening?"

Duckstem offered a smile, one that was meant to be comforting but ended up looking like a strange grimace. "I'm not quite sure, to be

honest. Rippleskip practically fell into my den tryin' to get me to help. I've never heard them talk so much!" She counted the herbs between her paws and set them aside before turning to Tundrapad. "You found them, yeah?"

Tundrapad nodded quickly. She'd been sitting while they talked, head ducked awkwardly beneath the low roof of the den. "I was patrolling the meadow and tripped over what I thought was a rock. I was confused though, because there wasn't a rock there before, and dug this kit up. They were totally buried in the snow! I don't know how long they were buried, but I'm shocked that they're still alive!"

The two other she-cats stared thoughtfully, before Duckstem nodded slightly. She flicked her thin tail to dismiss Tundrapad, who scooted out of the den.

Plumrose nosed the kit gently, her small gasp breaking the silence. Her own two kittens were trying to get a better look. "What's wrong, Mom?" a small white-and-orange kit asked. Plumrose nudged her away.

"Duckstem, they have a claw-wound across their face." Plumrose's voice was dark with rage. "Some cat attacked them and left them for dead."

Duckstem looked dismayed. "It's a wonder they're alive. Perhaps StarClan themselves are watching over them." The two sat in silence for a moment.

"I trust you'll take them in, Plumrose?"

"Of course," the orange tabby responded quietly, staring sadly but fondly down at the sleeping bundle between her paws.

The tortoiseshell nodded. "Good. I'll leave you with medicine for them to take when they wake up. Burnet for strength, chamomile to keep them calm, and juniper berries for breathing. Send Elderkit to come get some marigold and cobwebs for that gash once they wake up."

Plumrose nodded and Duckstem dipped her head, leaving the den quietly. The kit slept quietly, breathing steady but rasping. Plumrose stared down at her, eyes soft. "Hang in there, little one. You're safe now."

•~*~•

Tundrapad (she/her). art and design by me.

Chapter 2

A starry landscape wavered in Myrtlekit's vision. Their head hurt at the sight of this strange, otherworldly place that rippled like water around her. Even the sounds of this place were distinctly warped; birdsong and the sound of laughter warbling strangely from all directions. And it was warm. *Extremely* warm. Myrtlekit felt as if they were melting into a puddle. Feeling ill and unbearably hot, she looked down to see what on earth was making them feel this way. But now, terror sent a chill through every hair on their pelt.

Blood soaked her normally white paws in a rich crimson hue. It weighed heavy in their pelt, like she was soaked to the skin in sun-baked, stagnant water. When Myrtlekit tried to scream, they found that blood choked out her voice and gurgled in her throat like vomit. Disgustedly she hunched over, forcing as much of the viscous liquid out of themself as she could, just enough to cry out for someone, *anyone*, to rescue her.

But the shriek she uttered was not her own.

"FloodClan!" Silverstreak's strained death-rattle clawed its way out of her throat.

Faint memories of what *had to* have been a nightmare began to weave into formation like patchwork, but the sound and feel of their own throat being torn out chased the images at the boundary of Myrtlekit's mind back into the darkness. The scorching darkness, where she bled out and melted into a puddle of her and her mother's blood.

•~*~•

Myrtlekit's swollen eyes slammed open, tearing up at the blinding light of day. Their claws flailed at the padding of moss around her, catching on what felt like fur beside her. The silver kit's jaw wrenched itself open in a shriek, one that was ultimately futile because her throat hurt so badly. *My body hurts!* Myrtlekit wailed

silently, *I'm on fire! I'm dying!*

Just as they felt as if the world would finally slip out from under her paws, two soft forelegs pulled her close and steadied them, hugging her close to a chest of plumy, soft, snow-white and ginger fur that smelled faintly of milk. "N-no! I'm s... s-scared!" Myrtlekit croaked, trying as hard as they could to sob as hard as she needed to right now.

The cat holding her purred rhythmically in response. The vibration rolled through Myrtlekit's frail body, and in a moment of exhaustion she realized that the world *wasn't* ending. Their muscles burned when the fear melted away, and she sunk limply into the downy fur of this new cat.

"There, there..." they soothed. With Myrtlekit's ears up near their throat, she could hear all of the distinct tones of the cat's voice. It was slightly deep and had a rasp to it, one that spoke of a life full of laughter and cries of joy. Myrtlekit wanted to cling onto that sound for the rest of her life, and they snuggled in close to hear it more.

The cat kept purring. "Oh, there you are, sweetheart. You're okay. I've got you." Myrtlekit hesitated before offering a slight nod, to which the cat responded to by lapping her forehead with such force that Myrtlekit tumbled backwards. Falling back onto soft moss, they couldn't help but let out a slight *mrrp* of surprise.

"Whoops! Sorry, Kid, you're light as a feather!"

As her eyes adjusted, the cat's face came into focus. They looked heavenly, haloed by golden sunlight that filtered in through the woven ceiling of the den. Their pelt was a dark ginger, marbled by darker red tabby stripes that patterned a thick coat of slightly curled fur. Their muzzle, paws, and chest were a striking white, nearly blinding when paired with their darker coloration. Unlike Myrtlekit, they weren't scrawny. They were stocky, thickset, and well-muscled. Their face was round and looked weathered the same way a cat would look after spending ages of their life smiling. And their eyes, Myrtlekit marveled, were round, and a rich, creamy brown color.

They must've noticed the kit was staring, because they smiled a smile that suited their face just perfectly. "I'm Plumrose, and I use she/her pronouns," she said. "I figured you'd rather know my name than den with a stranger, yeah?"

Myrtlekit nodded slowly. *Plumrose... Plum-rose...* The rhythm of her name was familiar, and it suited her perfectly. Suddenly, a thought pinged in Myrtlekit's brain, and they hoarsely asked "Are you a warrior cat?"

Plumrose nodded, gazing curiously upon her. Myrtlekit suddenly felt insecure, quickly breaking the eye contact they'd unknowingly initiated and staring straight down at her paws. She was almost startled to see that they were white now, and not the red they had imagined they were.

"What's your name?" the queen's question snapped her thoughts back into place. "M-Myrtlekit," they rasped. Plumrose nodded kindly.

"Well, good to meet you, Myrtlekit. Can I trouble you to take some herbs before I let you fall back asleep? They'll make you feel leagues better than you do now."

The silver tabby nodded, and sniffed at the assortment of leaves and small blue berries in front of her. Unnerved by the pungent green scent, she cast a questioning glance at Plumrose.

Plumrose pushed the herbs closer with a large, soft white paw. "They taste as bad as they smell," she admitted, "but it'll be worth it when you wake up."

Myrtlekit shrugged. The herbs didn't smell *bad,* necessarily. Just... strong. Screwing her eyes shut, she lapped up the leaves and berries and violently shuddered, barely able to force a swallow.

Plumrose mumurmed a soft *'good job,'* before motioning Myrtlekit closer. The prospect of snuggling back into the warm ginger queen's soft fur again seemed like the highest form of a blessing, and they didn't ask twice before curling in between Plumrose's striped forelegs.

She rested her broad chin on Myrtlekit's flank, her muzzle close enough to Myrtlekit's face that her soft breath slightly stirred the fur on their face. They couldn't help but close her eyes almost immediately. Plumrose's steady heartbeat, the weight of her head, the softness of her fur, and her rhythmic breath lulled Myrtlekit into sleep.

•~*~•

When her eyes opened, they focused easily. And much to Myrtlekit's relief, they weren't in the uncanny place she had awoken in before. In fact, she was greeted by two entirely new faces and voices.

Plumrose's head was slightly raised, and she spoke quietly to two cats who Myrtlekit guessed were around their own age. "Pansykit, I need you to be mindful that Myrtlekit went through something scary, and you need to manage your tone."

A round, fluffy cat scowled. "How come you aren't saying this to Elderkit?" she mumbled crossly, looking away.

Plumrose sighed. "You know the answer already!"

The scowl on her face cracked almost immediately into a fluttery giggle. "Yea, I don't know why I said that! Oh— Mom, look! They're awake!"

Pansykit's lunge towards Myrtlekit was halted by one of Plumrose's large paws, and Pansykit shuffled backwards apologetically. Plumrose nudged Myrtlekit to her paws, gentler this time as to accommodate their meager weight.

She was face to face now with two kits: The one on the left, Pansykit, was almost entirely white. Except, her tail and ears. Her tail, which curled cutely over her back, was dark ginger and tabby like Plumrose's pelt. Her ears, heart-shaped and flat on her head were, again, like Plumrose's; ginger and tipped with a darker red.

She was rounder and softer in shape than Plumrose, and had bright blue eyes. But by no means was she delicate; though she was small, there was certainly strength hidden beneath her thick downy fur.

Myrtlekit also noticed that she was trembling profusely, and from a quick glance at her face she guessed that she was *ecstatic* about something.

Pansykit's face was wide with a bright smile, one that seemed to scream to the world that this cat was sunshine incarnate. "I'm Pansykit!" she mewed, thumping a paw against her chest. "I'm one of Mom- I mean, Plumrose's kits!"

"And?" Plumrose urged.

Pansykit thought for a second, then lit up. "My pronouns are she/her! What are yours?"

Myrtlekit blinked, slightly surprised at the question but grateful at the utility of it. "Oh. U-umm... she/they?" Their voice was still quiet, but flowed out more smoothly than it had the last time she spoke.

Pansykit looked so overjoyed that it seemed like she'd burst. "Oh my gosh! Elderkit's the same! Right?" She turned her head to the other kit, who offered a small nod and an equally small smile.

Elderkit was the polar opposite of Pansykit; a dark, blue-black cat with fur that reminded Myrtlekit of the night sky. Stark on their face were her own blue eyes, which were a darker and richer blue than Pansykit's, almost bordering on indigo. They were lean and lanky, with sleek and sharp fur that lay flatly. The tip of their tail was like a spray of fur, somewhat akin to a lion's tail but spikier. Her ears were tall and spiky as well, and sat evenly atop her head. They sat so still that Myrtlekit could've sworn she was cut from obsidian.

"Elderkit doesn't like to speak," Pansykit explained. "But our whole Clan knows this signal-language so that we can communicate with our non-speaking Clanmates easier... like... like Rippleskip!" She sat back with closed eyes and a smug grin, glancing expectantly at her mother.

"Yes yes. Wonderful job, Pansykit," Plumrose purred. "If I may continue—"

"WAIT! Wait, let me explain the rest!" Pansykit shouted. Without waiting for an answer, she said, "We're in FloodClan! That is... one of the four Clans that live around here. I don't really know much about the other ones, but that's okay because FloodClan's the best! We have a river, and cool willow trees, and we swim and fish and... umm..."

Myrtlekit felt excitement spark in their chest, She'd learned this all before from... *I can't remember who told me, but I know what FloodClan is!*

"You all have long fur that resists water!" the silver tabby burst out, paws kneading the moss lining of the floor. Pansykit nodded rapidly. "Yes! Yes, we do! So we can swim *in* the river!"

Myrtlekit glowed at the affirmation, listening intently when Pansykit continued, sheepishly this time. "A-and we were all wondering if you wanted... to stay with us? L-like, as mine and Elderkit's littermate! And M- Plumrose's daughter!"

They sat with that offer for a bit. *I mean, where else am I supposed to go?* Myrtlekit thought, then nodded her affirmation. Pansykit was bouncing around on her paws, shaking profusely. "Can I hug you now!?" she asked as if she'd been waiting to say this for her whole life.

Right as Myrtlekit nodded again, Pansykit had tackled her into a strong, firm hug. Her forelegs pulled Myrtlekit in close against her, and she shook them a little bit. Myrtlekit couldn't help but giggle a little; Pansykit's energy was contagious.

Plumrose nudged them apart. "Okay, that's enough excitement," she said, eyes glowing. "I think you three need a nap."

Realization dawned on the kits that they were *exhausted.* Though this whole ordeal hadn't taken more than a few heartbeats, it was a lot of emotion for them to handle. Elderkit and Pansykit took up a position snuggled against Plumrose's side, and Myrtlekit stared at them.

Plumrose tipped her head to the side. "Well? Come nap with us,

Myrtlekit! You're part of the family now!"

A feeling like warm honey washed over Myrtlekit, and she curled in between Plumrose's forelegs and lightly butted their head against her chin. Again, the queen rested her head on Myrtlekit's flank, and as if it were natural, Myrtlekit fell easily into sleep.

•~*~•

[image]

Plumrose (she/her). art by me.

Chapter 3

[image]

Pansykit and Elderkit were already awake by the time Myrtlekit opened her eyes. *This isn't a dream?* she thought giddily, sitting up and stretching. By now, their muscles felt better and their lungs felt clear. She *mrrow*ed a greeting to her new littermates.

The two kits weren't far from her, sitting at the mouth of the nursery and talking. Or rather, Pansykit was talking. Elderkit nodded their head along attentively. "Sunkit and his sibs are gonna be apprentices soon!" Pansykit boasted, blue eyes glittering. "I wish we weren't one moon younger than them! Then we could all train together! Though, I guess we'll still have lots of time together before they become warriors... oh!"

Her round head turned to look at Myrtlekit, smiling brighter than before. "Good morning, Myrtlekit!" she trilled, skipping over to the small silver tabby and head-butting her fondly. Myrtlekit nearly fell over at the force of her affection, but offered a purr regardless.

Elderkit waved her tail, the glare of the sun framing their body. "Mom told us to go get stuff from Duckstem for your face," Pansykit said. Myrtlekit glanced around, and noted with a touch of dread that Plumrose wasn't in the den. *What happened? Why did she leave? Did she die?Plumrose is dead?*

Pansykit licked her muzzle reassuringly. "She's just patrolling, don't worry."

Myrtlekit's heart was still racing painfully, and their shoulders were tensed uncomfortably. *Why would she leave? Does she not want me?* Another weight sunk against her flank, and Myrtlekit whipped their head to the side, shocked to see that Elderkit had appeared to lean against her. "How did you walk so quietly?" Myrtlekit whispered, fear dulled by curiosity. Elderkit shrugged.

"We'll take you to see Duckstem and then do a FloodClan tour from

there," Pansykit explained. "You'll meet the other kits! Normally they share the nursery, but Duckstem and Plumrose wanted it to be quiet, so they've been sleeping in the apprentice's den." The white-and-ginger kit beckoned for Myrtlekit to follow, her curled tail wagging. Myrtlekit plodded through the thick moss layer that covered the den floor, ears pricked. A cool scent wafted in from the den entrance. It smelled green and crisp, and the scent was accented by the fresh aroma of running water.

"The other dens are different from ours," Pansykit said. "You'll see that we're under a big bush surrounded by reeds. Plumrose told us that the bush flowers when the warm seasons come."

Myrtlekit glanced back at the den, taking in the sight more thoroughly now that she felt awake enough to do so. It was a wide space, the floor lush and green with padded moss and colorful feathers, and there was a column of packed dirt in the center. Slotted into some parts of the column were smooth, colorful stones. Roots poked out of the column in random places, and small jingling trinkets hung from several of them. "The bush is still alive?"

Elderkit nodded. "Cool, right?" Pansykit added, "Plumrose told us it's an ancient gift from StarClan, to protect us kits from danger."

Myrtlekit nodded. The foliage of the bush was extremely dense, acting as a natural roof and only allowing enough space between the branches to let some sunlight dapple the mossy floor. There were more hanging feathers and shining trinkets woven into the bush ceiling, tucked in between the tighter branches.

Their two littermates slipped up out of the burrow. The entrance to the nursery sloped upward sharply, but wasn't so high that kits their age couldn't climb out. Digging in her claws into the outer rim of the burrow, Myrtlekit heaved herself up with all of their strength. They were huffing and puffing on the ground by the time she was out, feeling dizzy with exertion.

Pansykit stared concernedly down at her. "Do you want to go back? We can go and get the herb-"

"No," Myrtlekit interrupted, slowly rising to their paws. *Quit being a*

jerk, Myrtle, she thought miserably. "I... I, um, want to see the camp..."

"Okay, but we can go back any time. Just say so."

The silver kit blinked gratefully at Pansykit. Glancing away, Myrtlekit had to stop themself from gasping. The camp was hued with a cool shade of forest green, and willow leaves swayed in the breeze. The rustling of the hanging leaves harmonized with the quiet babbling river just a few tail-lengths from camp. Water flowed smoothly over the pebbles, making the air tremble with noise. Rooted into the ground were the same colorful, smooth rocks that were in the nursery; there were even some shells. Looking up, Myrtlekit could hardly see the sky behind the overhang of weeping willow, and found that the dim, green-hued light didn't make her eyes hurt like sunlight usually did.

Unlike the main clearing, sunlight was plentiful in a sheltered area a few pawsteps from the nursery. Through a swaying curtain of overgrown willow switches, huge and flat stones were embedded in the well-worn floor of the camp. Further back from the stones was a massive and porous boulder with a yawning cave mouth near the top, and a stone incline rounding the structure. Several tail-lengths from that was a pile of more flat stones, and a few cats snoozing atop them in the sunlight.

"Those are the basking stones, and behind them is the Elders' den," Pansykit said. "The warmth is good for Troutrush's bones. He's our only elder, and he is *old!"*

"You'd do well to respect your elders." A voice interrupted, amusement in their voice. A big white cat stood near them. Their massive paws were stained with an array of bright colors. *Danger. You need to run, now!* But they froze.

They lowered themself down to Myrtlekit's eye level and dipped their head. "My name's Storkwing. Please refer to me with 'he' and 'him." Storkwing's voice was soft and rumbling, like a purr. "You must be Myrtlekit. It's good to meet you."

Much to Myrtlekit's relief, he nodded and padded away towards the

basking stones.

Pansykit exhaled loudly. "Whew! I can't believe he didn't yell at me!" she said, eyes wide. "Somehow that guy always catches me at my worst! He scolds me more than Mom!" She rolled her blue eyes and grumbled. "I hope one of the other kits gets him as a mentor. Kitekit would 'do well' to be taught when to keep his mouth shut."

Myrtlekit blinked, straining to slow their racing heart. *Don't be afraid. Storkwing seems like a good cat. He cares about his older Clanmates.*

Elderkit was already padding away, diagonally across the clearing towards a massive willow trunk. It was huge, the trunk stained with brightly-colored patterns, and the tree itself was adorned with little trinkets hanging from some of the willow switches swaying above the ground. In the wind, the little bits of treasure made a twinkling sound when they clinked into one another, adding more music to the symphony that was FloodClan. As they neared the trunk, a wide hollow revealed itself before them.

Since it was buried halfway in the ground, Myrtlekit didn't see the den until she was a fox-length away. Above the entrance of the den, hanging from woven threads of cobweb, were herbs suspended upside down to dry. The aroma from the den was familiar, Myrtlekit remembered. *Like the herbs I ate the other day that made me feel better.*

The ground right at the den entrance was stained with splashes of blue, red, and green; smelling faintly of crushed berries and grass. Elderkit slipped past a curtain of spidery, hanging moss. Pansykit and Myrtlekit followed close behind, noses scrunching at the pungent fragrance.

The den itself was dark and separated into chambers. The first chamber they stood in was laden with herbs; dry and hanging from the ceiling, stacked in organized piles on different roots that acted as shelves, and mixtures of different plants wrapped in neat bundles, stored in dug-out wall nooks. Further back was a tunnel leading to a chamber that looked like a cave, with a small stream of water splashing into a round, cat-length, crystal-clear pool. A

chamber branching out from the side of the tunnel was lined with moss and lavender, some of the aromatic plant hanging from the ceiling and some woven into the nests themselves. Myrtlekit noticed a few spiders calling the den their home, and wondered curiously why they were allowed to stay.

A round head poked out of the lavender chamber of the den. They were a dark brown tortoiseshell, flecked with spots of dark orange and black. Lighter brown patches adorned their ears, half of their muzzle, their chest, and one of their front toes. Their eyes were a striking amber, nearly glowing in the low light. Myrtlekit's fur spiked.

"The spiders keep away actual pests," they explained, hurrying out of the chamber. "Anyways, you haven't met me but I've met you. I'm Duckstem, and I prefer to be referred to with 'she' and 'they.'" Duckstem was small and shaggy, and she had a half-length tail that was rather fluffy.

Myrtlekit tipped her head. "I-I'm sorry, I don't remember you." Her white paws shuffled in the dirt, anxiety creeping in beneath her pelt. *Yellow eyes. Remember?*

Duckstem purred. "No big deal, kiddo. I'm not gonna eat ya. Follow me, real quick?"

The silver kit hesitated, glancing at her siblings. Duckstem sighed. "They can come too, if they don't make a mess."

Pansykit squealed a little bit and Elderkit nodded stoically. The group padded into the lavender chamber, the scent making Myrtlekit relax slightly.

"Take a seat in a nest while I grab the supplies I need," the tortoiseshell called, padding away. Elderkit and Pansykit sat by Myrtlekit, and Pansykit began another explanation.

"Duckstem is our medic. They manage the herb supplies and can fix anything from sneezes to... uh... scratches on your face. Like what you have," Pansykit kneaded the moss. "Oh, and get this...! Duckstem is *really* close with our Clan's leader," she whispered and

leaned towards Myrtlekit. "They're *in love!* Isn't that sweet!?"

Myrtlekit nodded, unsure of what the big deal was. Duckstem slipped back into the den with spiky leaves, damp moss, and cobweb in her jaws.

Separating their supplies into distinct piles, the medic set to work. "Hmmm... what to talk about?" she pondered quietly, carefully dabbing the wet moss around the crusted blood on Myrtlekit's face. She tried hard not to wince.

When the wound was suitably cleaned, it started welling with blood.

"I'll explain my, uh, headquarters," Duckstem said, pressing the now barely damp moss firmly against the scratch. "The den you're in is for my patients who need to be supervised. I incorporated lavender because it's stressful to be in such bad shape that you're stuck with me. It helps ya sleep."

Duckstem removed the bloodied moss, setting it behind her and pawing a clawful of leaves into her jaws. "This is marigold for infection," she covered her chewing mouth with a paw, then spat the poultice onto it. "This is a little gross, sorry."

Carefully she spread the marigold paste into the wound. Now, Myrtlekit winced slightly. "It stings," she whispered, "is that bad?" *Will I die?*

"That's just the wound trying to heal," Duckstem said, "totally normal. Anyways..."

They grabbed a thick roll of cobwebs and expertly pulled out a long, even wad that would cover the whole wound. Spreading the bandage over the wound, Duckstem continued, "The little cave in the back is my most reliable source of moss and water. Not sure where the water comes from, the hole in the rock it runs from is too small to see. Eh... I also sleep back there."

Finally, she patted the wound and smiled. "There we go. I'll change the poultice and bandage tomorrow. Pansykit, Elderkit, can you

leave ahead of Myrtlekit? I need to tell them somethin'."

The kits glanced at each other, then Myrtlekit, and then slunk away. Myrtlekit shrunk slightly. *Am I in trouble? Why do they need to leave? I need to run, I need to-*

"You're not in trouble," Duckstem comforted. Myrtlekit flinched. *Can she read my mind!?*

"...and no, I can't read your mind. Kits always worry about being in trouble. Well, kits like you."

Myrtlekit flattened her tall ears against their head. "*Like me*?"

Duckstem nodded. "Not in a bad way. I just mean that you're very likely to overthink things and scare yourself because of it. I was the same when I was younger, and I had to stop being a warrior because of it. I wanted to say a few things that may help you.

Mainly that you're not alone. It's not just Plumrose and her kits that are your family; the whole Clan is your family. I'd be honored if you felt safe enough to confide in me, if necessary."

Myrtlekit nodded slowly, still looking at her paws. "I *do* get scared," they whispered, voice shaking. "This morning I was so scared when I saw Plumrose was gone. I-I don't know why. And- and I'm scared of new cats! I'm *so* scared! L-like, Storkwing scared me because-"

Duckstem brushed her tail across Myrtlekit's paw. She startled and looked up at the medic, blinking away tears she didn't know were streaming down her face. Quickly, they wiped them away with a paw. *Mouse-brain. Stop crying, she's gonna think you're pathetic.*

"It's okay, love. You don't need to explain yourself to me. I believe you."

Liar. They're lying to you. Myrtlekit whimpered and hunched over, leaning into Duckstem when the tortoiseshell nuzzled her. "While I can't know if our situations were similar, I know how to cope with post-traumatic stress. It... it doesn't go away, but there are ways you can live with it," Duckstem flicked Myrtlekit's chin with her tail, urging her to sit up. "You'll hurt your back hunchin' over like that,

kiddo. And believe it or not, sittin' up straight will help you feel more confident."

The little tabby obliged, sitting up straight as she could. *I look stupid. Why am I doing this?*

"You look great sitting up all strong. Like a young Willowstar. You're gonna grow up and be bigger than your whole family," Duckstem said, a smile on her face. Though Myrtlekit was unnerved by the supposed mind-reading, she knew she could trust this cat. *You're wrong. You can't trust her.* She shook her head.

"Hmm, I'll bet your sibs are missin' you. Take some deep breaths and I'll let you go, alright?"

Myrtlekit stood up, exhaustion tugging at her limbs. When she plodded out of the den chamber, Duckstem meowed after her: "I'll get you some lavender for your nest, kiddo. It'll help you sleep a bit easier."

She smiled gratefully, slipping through the den curtain and crawling up the sloping entrance. Her sisters were indeed waiting. Before Pansykit could continue the tour, Myrtlekit murmured, "Can we go back to the nursery? I'm... I'm really tired."

Pansykit nodded, worry clouding her gaze. Quietly, except for the rushing of the willows, the twinkling of the hanging trinkets, and the ever-running river, the three littermates made their way back to the nursery to rest.

•~*~•

Duckstem (she/they). art by me.

•~*~•

A/N: as someone with PTSD, i created Myrtlekit's story as a way to portray and process the feelings it brings. Myrtle's not really a self-insert, but more of a vessel?? what i mean is that it's hard for me to express my thoughts, so i write her inner thoughts as a mirror to my own so that i can get all that gunk out somehow. anyways, thanks for reading! <3

TL;DR, the italicized sentences are Myrtlekit's intrusive thoughts. there's nothing supernatural lol

Chapter 4

[image]

"Let all cats of FloodClan join beneath the Weeping Willow for a Clan meeting!"

Myrtlepaw jolted awake at the call, blinking away cloudy delirium. Pansykit and Elderkit were already gone. Much to their relief, though, Plumrose was in the den with her.

"Morning. Or evening, rather," Plumrose said, flicking Myrtlekit's flank with her plumy tail. Myrtlekit stood up, stretching her back and shaking out her long coat. "What's happening?" they asked, looking up and studying the orange tabby's face.

Plumrose tipped her head towards the den entrance, urging her to follow while she explained. "Tonight is one of the other kits' apprenticeship ceremony," she said. She slipped out of the burrow den and pulled Myrtlekit out by the scruff. When she was back on the ground, Plumrose went on: "Iriskit. She's Lushtail's and Lotusglow's kit. You wouldn't think she's only six moons, though. She's almost bigger than Tundrapad!"

The two padded towards the crowd, sticking towards the fringes where there were less cats milling about. Plumrose picked her up again and scaled a rockfall several lengths away from the Willow. Myrtlekit felt dizzy at the height, scooting back to sit in between Plumrose's forelegs.

From their perch, they could see everything. The massive tree's roots twined around a boulder slightly above the medic's den, as if clinging to it for support. The boulder tapered to a dull point, where a pale silvery-blue tabby perched.

"That's Willowstar," Plumrose murmured. "She's been our leader for maybe twenty moons now. She was named leader much earlier than most leaders had been, after..." she stopped, thinking for a moment. "I'll tell you later. Looks like the meeting's about to start."

As the sun sunk slowly beneath the horizon, the crowd fell silent. "Tonight, it's important to remember that this may be one of Iriskit's most treasured memories. I trust you all to behave?" Willowstar called, a glimmer in her eyes.

A chuckle rolled through the gathering. When they stilled again, Willowstar flicked her silky tail.

The Clan parted at Willowstar's signal, leaving a clear pathway towards the perch. Myrtlekit squinted to see what was happening. Her breath caught at the sight.

A fluffy brown tabby she-cat slowly made her way through the crowd, accepting 'good luck's and 'thank you's along the way. As she glanced around, she caught Myrtlekit's eyes.

Myrtlekit's fur spiked, and they immediately looked away when Iriskit offered a smile. She dared to glance back to see if she was staring. Myrtlekit let out a breath she didn't know they'd been holding when they saw Iriskit's focus had shifted. Still staring, Myrtlekit noted that the molly looked very unique. Stark against Iriskit's dark oaken coat was a thick mane of white fur around her neck. Her paws were the same white, as was the tip of her long, fluffy tail. The contrast between the different colors of her fur made it seem as if she was glowing. *She's so pretty..!*

"Iriskit." The meow startled Myrtlekit out of their stupor. Willowstar was beginning the ceremony.

"You have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for a new chapter of your life to begin. From this day onward, until the time comes for you to receive your full warrior name, you will be known as Irispaw..." Willowstar hopped down from her perch, urging whispers from the crowd.

Plumrose's own folded ears pricked. *Does this not happen often? What... what* is *happening?*

"...I will be your mentor."

Irispaw seemed to weaken for a moment, haunches sinking and jaw

agape. She practically fell over herself pressing her red nose to Willowstar's, whispering something Myrtlekit couldn't hear. "I will pass on all I know to you, Irispaw," Willowstar finished. With a dip of her head, Irispaw flocked towards a gaggle of young cats, including Pansykit and Elderkit. They were the first to cheer out her new name.

"Irispaw! Irispaw! Irispaw!"

"Irispaw," Myrtlekit murmured.

Willowstar nodded slightly, and the crowd began to break off into different groups, to talk and celebrate through the night with their Clanmates. Plumrose swept Myrtlekit up by the scruff, hopped down the rockfall, and set them on the ground. "Would you like to go back to the nursery?"

Myrtlekit shook her head. Standing firmly, they mumbled. "I-... can I meet the other k- cats my age?" *Can I meet Irispaw?*

Plumrose nodded, beginning to walk. Myrtlekit trotted at her side, pressing close into her fur. Their heart began to pound painfully in their chest when the group of young cats came into view, sitting near the fresh-kill pile. Pansykit noticed first, and a big smile spread across her face.

The white-and-orange tabby peeled away from a young golden tom she had seemed to be glued to, bounding towards Myrtlekit. "I was worried you wouldn't come!" Pansykit purred, kneading the ground. "C- Ahh! I'm so excited! Can I introduce you to everyone?"

Myrtlekit stared at their white paws and nodded. Pansykit took a seat at her side and began pointing out each of the kits.

Sitting nearest to Myrtlekit (aside from Pansykit) was Poplarkit, she said. He was a dappled gray tom with green eyes, bearing a neutral expression. "He uses he/they pronouns," Pansykit said.

"The one next to Poplarkit is Kitekit! He uses he/him." Kitekit was half a head smaller than Poplarkit. He was brown with a white stripe from his head and down his tail, and was dappled with white

spots. His eyes were a vivid cerulean.

"Next to Kite is where me and Elderkit were sitting. And after that... Sunkit! He uses he/him. Isn't he so *cute*?" Pansykit sighed, a surprisingly shy smile on her muzzle.

Sunkit was a large, vivid gold tom with bright blue eyes and a coat of fur thick enough to match Pansykit's. He smiled shyly.

"Sunkit, Poplarkit, and Kitekit are littermates. Just barely a moon older than us! Oh, umm, next is... Hazelkit. She uses she/they."

Hazelkit eyed Myrtlekit. Her pelt was an ashy dark brown color, and was *very* spiky. She had hazel eyes, and their ears were tall and sharp-tipped, her tail whiplike, and her claws the color of blackthorn. *Claws?*

Hazelkit rolled her eyes at Myrtlekit, who didn't realize she'd been staring at their claws. "I can't sheathe them," she muttered coldly, scratching at the ground, "what, are you *scared* or somethin'?"

The mood shifted palpably. Myrtlekit was rooted in place, convinced her heart would beat out of her ears. Pansykit broke the silence with a laugh. "Lighten up, Hazel! I haven't even introduced Irispaw yet!"

Myrtlekit's head shot up, and she straightened her posture self-consciously. Irispaw was indeed big, and had big paws to match. Up close, Myrtlekit noticed that her eyes were a bright, yellowish-hazel, and her fur was a rich, dark, creamy shade of brown. *She looks soft...*

Pansykit eyed Myrtlekit, raising a brow. "Irispaw uses she/her pronouns. Aaaanyways... we'd all better get to our nests. Plumrose told me that the territory is huge, and Iris is probably gonna need *loads* of sleep to survive it."

"Can we *finally* come back to the nursery?" Kitekit grumbled. "The apprentice's den is too small. And so *dark*. It's unbearable."

"Whatever makes you happy, o great Kite*star*," Pansykit said. She looked to Myrtlekit for confirmation, who nodded.

Kitekit stood up and made a show of stretching every one of his lanky limbs. "Then can we get going? It's cold as bones out here, my fur's turning to ice!"

The rest of the group nodded, some rolling their eyes. Poplarkit flicked Kitekit over the ears with his tail, sticking close to his brother. Myrtlekit followed slowly.

"Hey, um, Myrtlekit?" A voice called. Her fur spiked and they whipped around, crouching near the ground. Irispaw took a step back, eyes wide. "Oh, sorry!" she said while Myrtlekit regained their composure. *Mouse-brain! Mouse-brain, stop being weird in front of her!*

"N-no problem," she mumbled, wincing internally. They stood awkwardly. Irispaw was the first to say something. "Well, I just wanted to say that it's nice to meet you, and welcome to the Clan."

Myrtlekit met her bright eyes, smiling as best as she could. "Thank you. A-and congratulations. And... um... good luck?" *Oh my stars I should just bury my head in the dirt to stop talking.*

Irispaw purred. "Thank you. I'll be heading to bed now. It'll be quiet with the toms gone." She padded past Myrtlekit, brushing her tail across her flank. Myrtlekit darted to the nursery, stumbling down into the burrow.

Pansykit looked *devious.* "Myrtle!" she purred slyly, sidling up to her sibling. "Irispaw sure is pretty, huh?" Myrtlekit ducked her head and jumped past Pansykit, large ears flicking. "I guess."

Before Pansykit could interrogate her any more, Myrtlekit curled up into the nest where Plumrose was waiting, watching with an amused smile. Myrtlekit wanted to disappear, her ears and muzzle were flushed and she was flustered. They took their place in between Plumrose's forelegs, curling up and pretending to sleep so she wouldn't be pestered about Irispaw. *Irispaw.*

As the den fell silent, she found that she was still wide awake and *extremely* confused. *Why was I being so weird? That was so embarrassing! Maybe Pansykit can tell me what I did wrong...?*

And through the night, Myrtlekit lay awake in her nest, eyes wide and thoughts racing.

•~*~•

The nursery was in chaos when Myrtlekit woke up. Plumrose had an exasperated look on her face, trying to separate Kitekit and Pansykit. They were locked in a fight, but... it didn't look like it. Myrtlekit couldn't help but snort with laughter.

Pansykit whipped her head up to grin at her, before going back to grappling Kitekit around his neck and pinning him into the moss rather effortlessly. He spat his defiance, *"StarClan, get off!* Sunkit, control your rabid girlfriend before she pulls out any more of my fur!" Kitekit snapped, pawing helplessly at Pansykit's pelt. Sunkit looked torn.

Sticking her tongue out at her defeated opponent, the small she-cat stepped off of Kitekit and padded towards Myrtlekit. "Good morning," she said sunnily. "Sorry for the noise. Kitekit ran his mouth again and I got annoyed. Had to teach him a lesson."

Myrtlekit watched Kitekit fume in the background, and realized that the nursery was... *way* too much right now. Glancing off to the side, they mumbled, "Can we finish the... the camp tour?"

Pansykit brightened. "Yeah! I can show you the Apprentices' den. Maybe *Irispaw* will be there?"

Myrtlekit couldn't stop themself from rolling their eyes. She turned around and started walking towards the den entrance, her ears burning. *I barely slept at all last night because of her teasing me!*

Pansykit's pawsteps, muffled by the moss lining the floor, followed after. "I'm just playing," she reassured in a quieter voice, brushing against her denmate's pelt. Myrtlekit flicked Pansykit's ears with their tail, smiling slightly. *Just playing. She doesn't mean anything by it.*

Outside of the den, the sky was heavy with clouds bearing the next day's worth of snowfall. Already some stray flakes snuck their way

through FloodClan's canopy, disappearing as they touched the earth.

The camp was quiet, but Myrtlekit could smell that most of the Clan was in and probably sleeping. *The adults probably stayed up all night after the ceremony. It's very nice of Willowstar to let them sleep in.*

"Hmmm!" Pansykit's hum seemed deafening compared to the leafbare silence that weighed in the air, "Let's start at the Apprentices' den and then loop around, so you can go get checked on by Duckstem after you see the Warriors' den."

The Apprentices' den was barely a fox-length from the nursery. Coming out of the nursery entrance, to the right was a thick cluster of reeds and cattails, and past that was an old sagging willow with thick roots that resembled spindly spider legs, trying to break free from the ground. One massive root crawled higher and farther than others, marking a climbable path through the barrier of reeds that touched down on the outside of the camp.

The burrow into the Apprentices' den didn't face out into the clearing like most of the other dens did. It faced the moat of reeds that hid FloodClan's camp entrance. The burrow entrance was darkened by cattails that leaned over the path down into the den, and the entrance itself was obscured by a curtain of hanging moss and lichen. Padding down the path into the den, Myrtlekit felt the path, hard-packed but marred by paw prints and claw-scratches. In fact, the lower trunk and roots of the willow were scored through with countless scratches. Higher up, the marks were less prominent, but much deeper.

Pansykit nudged beneath the lichen curtain, holding it up with her tail so Myrtlekit could slip through. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to the pitch darkness. The mildly unpleasant musk of a big group of young cats in one den together was faint, but still lingered in the air. The floor of the den looked as if it had recently been swept out and deep cleaned, and one nest took occupied a spot towards the center. The ceiling was low, and Myrtlekit could imagine that taller cats had stood and bumped their heads many, *many* times.

"Irispaw was smart to choose a nest in the middle," Pansykit commented with a small nod. "When the rest of us are apprenticed, she'll be warm and cozy surrounded by all of us. Also, it looks like she spent the rest of her night cleaning out all the nasty moss that the toms left behind!"

Myrtlekit's fur felt prickly in this small, dark space. The faint musty stench, the cramped conditions, and the near total darkness was suffocating. "I-I-I need to get out," she hissed, bolting out of the den.

She was abruptly stopped by a wall of muscly white-furred legs. They fell back with a grunt, wincing at the feel of the cold, hard ground against her spine.

"StarClan's name!" the wall exclaimed, taking a pace back. When Myrtlekit's eyes refocused, she took in the sight of this new cat. Though her fur prickled with fear, she felt safe in the fact that she recognized this cat. *Have I met them before?*

Blue eyes glimmered from above Myrtlekit's head; blue eyes on a round white face topped with folded over, shredded silver tabby ears. Myrtlekit realized with a start that they looked like a massive, gray-toned version of Pansykit.

Much to Myrtlekit's confusion, their blue eyes were watery with an off-putting range of emotions. "Oh! Myrtlekit! I'm so glad you're okay!"

•~*~•

Irispaw (she/her). art by me.

Chapter 5

[image]

TRIGGER WARNING:
this episode depicts a detailed panic attack that includes an instance of s*lf h*rm.
please read with caution.

•~*~•

Myrtlekit's eyes narrowed at the cat. *How do they know my name? Are they attacking me?*

The gray-and-white cat helped them back to their paws, broad head ducked in embarrassment. "That's not how I wanted our second meeting to go!" they said, smiling sheepishly and sitting back on their haunches.

Second? Myrtlekit's large ears tipped forward slightly. *Am I supposed to remember them?* "U-um... I'm sorry, I don't remember you...?"

The cat looked a bit crestfallen for a moment, but quickly switched back to their smiling self. "Yeah, I don't know why I thought you would. I'm Tundrapad, and my pronouns are 'she' and 'her.'"

That didn't clear up much of Myrtlekit's confusion. She twitched her ear awkwardly.

"*Wow,* this is rough. Usually I think straighter. I'm just so happy to see you; I haven't been around when you're out and about. The... the last time I saw you, you were halfway to StarClan." Tundrapad's expression was unreadable, but she wasn't smiling anymore.

Myrtlekit furrowed her brow for a moment to think. The earliest memory they could recall was... *The meadow, the river, and then a voice...*

Her eyes snapped back to Tundrapad, wide and glittering. "You're

the one who found me!" she whispered, paws kneading the ground. Suddenly Myrtlekit felt very self-conscious. "I'm so sorry I didn't remember! I— I don't really... I can't clearly think of what even happened to me, s-so...!"

Tundrapad halted her derailing train of thought. "No hard feelings, seriously! Only cat I'm mad at is Pansykit for not telling you about me!" She fell into a play bow, eyes narrowed and staring past Myrtlekit.

Myrtlekit turned around, confused. With wide eyes she just barely noticed Pansykit was barreling straight towards them, her paws practically a blur as she ran. Myrtlekit fell backwards out of the way, and heard the impact before she saw it.

They crashed into one another with matching war cries, writhing on the earth locked together in what could only be described as a world-ending showdown between sisters.

Seeing Pansykit and Tundrapad next to each other, Myrtlekit realized that they looked almost exactly the same. If not for Tundrapad's much bigger tabby patches, she would be a gray-toned clone of Pansykit. *She's* my *sister, too!* Myrtlekit realized, a smile playing across her muzzle.

Pansykit snarled her frustration and batted at the ground she was pinned on. Tundrapad was sitting on her, smirking down at her younger sibling and glowing with victory. "Let me go! Time-out!" Pansykit hissed, a whine in her voice.

"Say it," Tundrapad hissed. Her smirk somehow grew even more smug. Pansykit looked like she was about to explode. After some more of scrabbling helplessly beneath her opponent, Pansykit growled and snapped "FINE! You win! Now *get off!* You're as heavy as a hibernating bear!"

Tundrapad sidestepped off of Pansykit, chest puffed out in satisfaction. When she finally noticed Myrtlekit staring, her eyes widened. "Whoops! Sorry, Myrtlekit! We must do battle every time we meet eyes; it's customary!"

Her smaller sibling head-butted Tundrapad's wide shoulder. "One day I'll beat your tail so bad that you'll scamper right on back to Mom in the Nursery!"

"Big talk from a small fry," Tundrapad brushed her off, focusing back on Myrtlekit. "Wanna see the Warriors' den?"

I forgot we were doing our tour, Myrtlekit thought, thoroughly confounded by... whatever that was. "Oh, um, yes please!" they said, and let out a breath they didn't know they were holding.

She bounded after Tundrapad, determined to match the much larger warrior's long strides. Pansykit followed behind, muttering crossly.

The Warriors' den was much like the Elders' den; a massive chunk of porous rock with several dark entrances. The rock was formed strangely, its oddly smooth and geometric shape made up of flat stones that raised higher in elevation the closer they got to the den entrances. The stone steps stopped rising halfway up the formation, and gave ample space around two side-by-side cave openings, allowing several cats at a time to safely get in and out. Craning her head to see the top of the boulder, Myrtlekit noticed that the top of the formation broke through the willow canopy that shaded half of it. There were more holes in the rock towards the top, and Myrtlekit imagined that on sunny days, warm rays of light would seep into the den, allowing the warriors respite from the leafbare cold.

Tundrapad scaled the steps without much struggle. Unlike Myrtlekit and Pansykit, she could clear the rising stones in a few steps. Her two younger siblings struggled behind her, tired and out of breath.

"Here we are," the warrior said quietly, standing by the farthest entrance. Pansykit and Myrtlekit scampered towards her, past the entrance closer to the steps. "We come in through this way. It's more convenient that the exit is close to the stairs. Come on!"

The cave echoed hollowly inside. The ground was studded with colorful stones and shells, and separate woven nests were scattered about, as opposed to the Nursery's moss-laden floor.

Inside, some columns of stone rose higher than the ground-nests. Several progressively higher plateaus spiraled on the wall towards the peak, and there were even nests at the very top. Sunlight beamed through an opening above the topmost nest, disappearing quickly as a thick cloud moved to protect the sky from prying eyes.

A few warriors were inside lounging around. As Myrtlekit stared, she noticed Pansykit scaling the rising stone steps towards a black-furred cat in a nest near the middle of the wall. "Daaaad!" she yelled in her shrill voice, which echoed incessantly off the walls.

The tom lifted his head, revealing half-closed, deep blue eyes. He looked identical to Elderpaw, with fur black as night, and they very well could have been clones if not for his scruffy pelt.

Pansykit flopped onto her father, exhaling dramatically "I can't believe you made me climb this whole thing. Come and see Myrtlekit before I pass out from *exhaustion.*" He nodded slightly, nosing Pansykit up and trotting smoothly down the steps. Myrtlekit realized how Elderkit could step so lightly; her father could do the same!

Myrtlekit shrank back slightly when he lowered his head to sniff her. He didn't seem to notice her anxiety, and licked her ear in greeting. "I'm Stormspill," he murmured. His voice was very soft and quiet, as if he wasn't used to speaking. "My pronouns are he/him."

He was done speaking when Pansykit made it down. She was huffing and puffing with effort, but looked determined to keep talking. "Dad doesn't talk very much, but he *does* talk more than Elderkit."

Stormspill licked Pansykit's head as well, and padded back to his nest without a second glance. "He's not trying to ignore us," she said, "he just doesn't have a lot to say, and doesn't show affection too well." She stopped, looking thoughtful for a moment. "Actually, he usually hangs out with us whenever he's not out working. Tundra!"

Tundrapad *mrrp*ed in response, looking up from grooming a massive white paw. Pansykit sat close against her, leaning into her pelt as if

they hadn't been ferociously battling one another just several moments ago. "Why do you think Dad's so tired?" she asked.

The older cat growled quietly under her breath. "Our lovely neighbors have been gracing the meadow with their presence. They've been ramping up patrols at that border, almost as if they're just there to taunt us!"

Myrtlekit stared curiously. *Neighbors?* Faintly, they remembered another name that ended in -Clan, but couldn't recall it no matter how hard they tried.

A yowl outside the den stirred her from her reflection. Pansykit looked frightened but curious, and Stormspill had already left the den. Casting a glance back to Tundrapad, Myrtlekit's fur prickled when she noticed the white-and-gray molly's pelt spiking angrily. "MireClan. Speak of the devil," she said under her breath, gathering Myrtlekit and Pansykit close to her. The kits peeked outside the entrance to see what was going on.

Just brushing through the camp entrance, a large tom was faced with several snarling warriors, claws out and teeth bared. He looked faintly irritated while he stopped and waited. He was a pale-cream color with thick and wavy fur, slashed through with darker stripes reminiscent of a tiger's. Myrtlekit didn't have time to study his face.

"Magnoliamane," Willowstar's voice rang clearly. She stepped up to him, standing straight and staring coldly down into his eyes. "Don't tell me you think you can prance around our camp as well as our territory. Explain yourself."

The tom signaled with his tail, and several more strange cats filtered into the camp. The FloodClan cats stepped back to keep a distance between the intruders and Magnoliamane stood adjacent to Willowstar, glaring coldly at a snarling Stormspill guarding the steps.

Two cats had come in to flank the entrance, smelling similarly to Magnoliamane's marshy and damp musk. A hush fell over the clearing as the last cat stepped through.

Myrtlekit's bones turned to ice. Splayed across his back was a body, but it hardly resembled a cat. Long, faded silver tabby fur hung limply from a thin frame, clotted with blood and torn through with several huge gashes and scattered with smaller, but just as deadly, wounds. Their face was twisted with fear, mouth hanging open in an eternal cry for help. Finally, resting dully in wide open sockets were two cloudy eyes, their emerald green hue barely visible.

Myrtlekit felt her heart clench painfully. The edges of their vision were blurry and red, and black spots played across her sight. Unseeing, she slumped to the floor, trembling so hard that it seemed as if she bore her own tiny earthquake. The kit curled in on herself, forearms covering eyes that drowned in tears, and sharp little claws digging cruelly into her own head and ears. Myrtlekit thought their teeth were going to shatter, and her bones and her skull and her heart. Her heart, which pounded agonizingly in her ribcage. Their mind was a tempest of its own, loud and screaming and gurgling because of a throat filled with blood. One acute thought made it through the typhoon, and it blared deafeningly within Myrtlekit's being: *I'm going to die.* A shriek tore itself from their lungs, and as she screamed out all of her air, her vision went black.

•~*~•

Willowstar's eyes were wide with terror, and her hind legs gave out. Other than Myrtlekit screaming, the camp was dead silent. Plumrose was frozen, glancing between the body and Myrtlekit, who looked so similar. Tears streamed down a trembling Pansykit's face, her body draped over her sister's like a shield, and paws fumbling to stop Myrtlekit from clawing her own ears off. Tundrapad was quiet, numbly nudging the two kits into the Warriors' den.

Breaking through the fog of terror, Duckstem stepped in front of Willowstar, furiously glaring into Magnoliamane's eyes.

Without any prompting, Magnoliamane spoke. "One of our border patrols scented FloodClan on our border with Twolegplace. FloodClan, blood, and rogues. Fearing the worst, a battle party was sent out to take care of the issue. They found..." he glanced at the

body, "*...this,* on the small island that split the river in two. It— *they* were killed by rogues, who stood on the opposite shore and gloated. The mousebrains thought they were one of MireClan's cats. I personally led the patrol to fi—"

The cat shouldering the corpse pushed Magnoliamane aside, lip curled in a snarl "Mind your rank, Magnoliamane. This is a matter for leaders, their deputies, and their medics. *Not* a simple warrior."

The cream-furred tom dipped his head and stepped back. Duckstem addressed them first. "Cougartooth," she said evenly, "thank you for bringing our Clanmate back. If you will, please bring Silverstreak to my den. Order your cats to get out, and *you* need to get out as soon as she leaves your back."

Cougartooth dipped his head and motioned for his patrol to leave. Duckstem rested her tail on Willowstar's shoulder, guiding her towards her den before bringing Cougartooth to the Medic's quarters.

Two of the MireClan cats left as soon as the signal was given. One lingered.

Ears flattened against the screams of a kit, he looked around to find the source of the noise. When his eyes fell on the wailing ball of silver fur, he blinked once and then slipped out of the camp.

•~*~•

The moon coldly observed FloodClan's vigil. Silverstreak lay peacefully in the clearing, wounds thoroughly covered with carefully arranged flowers. Lavender just barely masked the reek of death that wafted from her.

A small silver kit was curled into her fur, nose pressed into her belly. They shook with sobs barely muffled by Silverstreak's pale silver belly fur.

Eventually, she could cry no more. Having cried out every sliver of her being, Myrtlekit faded back into unconsciousness.

•~*~•

Myrtlekit leaned against the warm form of her mother, listening to her breathing as if it were the most beautiful sound in the world. She felt calmed in this glade of soft grass and warm sun, ringed by a thick forest bearing a thick canopy of countless pink flowers.

She stared into her mother's emerald green eyes and felt more content than she had felt in days. They listened intently as Silverstreak spoke.

"Do you know what gossamer is?" she asked. "It's the material that spider silk is woven from. It's thin, and delicate, and fragile. But, that same gossamer is also robust, and powerful."

Birdsong echoed quietly in the background when Silverstreak paused for a breath. "Gossamer, spider silk, is able to shoulder so *much weight, and it will not break; matter how heavy the burden, it will not break."*

Myrtlekit stayed quiet and unmoving, thinking: This metaphor can't be about me. I've already broken and died with you, Silverstreak.

Silverstreak drew her tongue across her forehead and rose to her paws. Starlight fell from her like snow. One last time, she pressed her nose into Myrtlekit's head.

"I love you so, so much. More than you can imagine. I love you, and you're strong. So much stronger than most kits your age have to be."

Myrtlekit tried to stand up with her mother but found that she was frozen in place. She tried to open their mouth to respond, but no sound came out. No, no, I need you. I can't be strong without you! *she thought, willing her words to reach Silverstreak.*

"I love you, Myrtlekit. And I believe in you, *the 'you' who is allowed to exist without me"*

Myrtlekit's mind screamed in protest as Silverstreak padded into the forest. It felt as if she was screaming, crying, sobbing, begging her to not leave. Mom? Mom, no, don't go! I love you, I love you, I *need* you! Please don't leave yet! Please don't leave me again!

They felt their heart breaking in their chest as Silverstreak disappeared with a shimmer of starlight. The glade was quiet again, but Myrtlekit thought that this silence was the most ear-splitting sound that could

exist.

Everything was calm for a moment, and still. Stars floated lazily above the soft grass, and pink petals drifted down from the trees to rest on the earth. A dragonfly flitted around, wings glittering a rainbow of colors.

You again, *Myrtlekit thought. Just like that night, their entire being focused in on the creature before her. Her eyes tracked its movement, its steady flight closer and closer.*

The dragonfly hovered in the air for a moment, wings flashing with starlight. Delicately, as if not to startle her, it alighted on Myrtlekit's nose.

It lingered for a moment, and Myrtlekit felt quiet and content. When the dragonfly stirred its wings again, colors and starlight dazzled Myrtlekit's eyes, whiting out the scene of the glade completely.

And it was dark again, and it smelled like lavender, and Myrtlekit fell asleep.

•~*~•

Elderkit, Pansykit, and Myrtlekit. art by me.

Chapter 6

•~*Early Newleaf*~•

The den was dark, and Myrtlekit could not move.

Cracking open her green eyes, she could just barely see the inside of the den. Exhaustion tugged at her limbs, and once again they resolved to sleep.

But, Myrtlekit realized, the den was *hot.* Suffocating, even. Digging their claws into the moss, Myrtlekit scrambled for purchase that would allow for her freedom. Heavy weight shifted on top of her, and after a moment of struggle she popped free.

Her denmates were snuggled up in a massive pile. *And I was in the center?* Myrtlekit realized, amusement making her whiskers twitch. *How did I not even notice?*

The Nursery was full to bursting with the now apprentice-aged cats, and Plumrose had opted to move out the moment the kits turned five moons old. Myrtlekit didn't have to wonder why.

In the four moons since her arrival, Myrtlekit had shot up in height. It was hard to recognize her as the scrawny bundle of bones and fur that Tundrapad had tripped over in the snowy meadow. Now, she had to duck their head low to avoid catching her tall ears on the thick foliage of the Nursery roof.

Getting out of the den posed an even bigger problem. As Myrtlekit grew, crawling out of the burrow became more and more awkward; her lanky body required her to bend uncomfortably, and her massive paws did nothing to help. In fact, her paws were the issue right now. Staring out over the sea of sleeping cats, Myrtlekit sighed.

After a precarious dance of stepping methodically in between her sprawled out denmates, she ducked down and pulled herself out

into the clearing.

Peeking through the viridescent willow canopy were twinkling stars, reminiscent of the snowflakes that fell in leafbare. The night was comfortably cool, a quiet breeze rustling the soft clover budding in patches around the FloodClan clearing. Myrtlekit took a few steps forward before sitting down and curling their tail around their white paws.

When the sun rises, I'll be a FloodClan apprentice, Myrtlekit pondered. Them and all of their other denmates were sharing a ceremony. Despite Hazelkit, Sunkit, Poplarkit, and Kitekit being a little older than Plumrose's litter, Sunkit had managed to convince them all to delay their ceremony so that all of them could be denmates for their entire apprenticeship. Myrtlekit was confused at the gesture, her days of sharing a tiny den with six other nearly full-grown cats made her realize that personal space was very pleasant, and very rare, to come by.

Another thought fluttered into their head. *I'll finally be able to get to know Irispaw.* Her ears and face flushed at the thought. Myrtlekit's crush, which she now accepted was, in fact, a crush, hadn't dwindled at any point. Pansykit was sure to remind them of it. Every one of their denmates knew, and only Hazelkit and Kitekit thought that Irispaw wasn't worth chasing.

In this moment, their mind was quiet, the breeze whispered, and the trinkets hanging from the willow switches clinked together faintly.

"Myrtlekit," a voice called, low but clear.

The silver tabby turned towards the source of the sound. Resting perched atop the Leader's Ledge, Willowstar beckoned them over with a flick of her tail.

Myrtlekit flattened an ear in confusion before trotting over and looking up to her. Willowstar's pelt glowed blue in the sparse moonlight, and she looked ethereal. "Come up," the molly said, a small smile beneath her tired greenish-blue eyes.

The young cat dug her claws into the Weeping Willow cautiously, scrambling up to take a place next to Willowstar. At her suggestion, she laid down.

Willowstar was staring into the FloodClan clearing, and then into the sky between the swaying willow leaves. "You've grown awfully big," she mused. Indeed, the two cats were nearly the same height. Myrtlekit was sure to grow taller throughout the next few moons. "Are you ready for your apprenticeship?"

Myrtlekit stared at her paws, uncomfortably wide in comparison to their twiggy legs. Up until now, she'd been pretending it wasn't happening and that her life wasn't about to change again. Fear caused her hackles to raise slightly. "I... don't know if I'm ready," Myrtlekit admitted. "I don't know what 'being ready' means. I guess I'm just waiting to get it over with."

The Clan leader chuckled. "The feeling of 'being ready' is subjective. You'll know when you are."

They sat in silence again, Willowstar breathing a sigh.

"I was the same. Grew up during the beginning of the war, and I questioned if I really wanted to spend my life fighting a never-ending battle. Now I know that the battle will only have the chance to end *if* I fight." She let her words hang in the air for a moment.

The molly turned to study Myrtlekit's face. "Silverstreak was born ready. She spent every waking moment begging to be made an apprentice early, and it was no surprise that when her time came she excelled far above the rest of us." Myrtlekit's ears pricked. She hadn't heard her late mother's name spoken for moons. Cats walked on thin ice around her, as if she'd shatter just at the breath of Silverstreak's name.

Willowstar's eyes traced the scar that crossed Myrtlekit's face. "You look just like her, right down to having a scar on your muzzle." Her turquoise eyes lit up for a moment, and she smiled when she said, "Would you like to hear about how she got it? There's nothing violent about this story, don't worry." Myrtlekit nodded slowly.

The silvery-blue leader leaned back her head slightly, shifting her paws beneath her pale chest. Her eyes closed contentedly, and she smiled as she spoke.

"The night after our apprenticeship ceremony she was wide awake. Kept the whole den up with her chattering, and it was starting to get on the senior apprentices' nerves. Eventually she said one word too many, and got kicked out of the den. I followed her, because I thought they'd kick me out by association.

Silverstreak, Silver*paw* at the time, was livid. Right then and there, she resolved to go on an adventure to bring back a trophy or a story that was sure to make the senior apprentices respect her. StarClan knows that Silverpaw could not be stopped once there was an idea in her brain. She decided to patrol the entire territory in one night, and hopefully chase off some MireClan intruders.

Of course I followed her. I didn't want her to get in trouble, as she so often did. It was the middle of the night but Silverpaw was brimming with energy, and somehow we crossed the entirety of our land up to FloodCamp. She wanted to make sure the camp was clear, even though the flood season had long since passed.

I obliged. We were two new apprentices, deep in the woods, and FloodCamp was the only nearby shelter. So up we went. I waited at the first watchpoint while Silverpaw, hmm, 'patrolled.'

Suddenly I heard a crash and a yowl. I scrambled to where the sound came from, and found Silverpaw fully stuck in a thornbush at the bottom of the FloodCamp plateau. When I got her untangled, she insisted that there was an intruder she valiantly chased off, and that the scratch across her nose was proof. I indulged her, even though I smelled her blood on the thorns," Willowstar purred. "How could I not? I knew if I didn't that we'd be out here even longer; I knew her best. She is... *was*... my sister, after all."

Myrtlekit's eyes widened. "Sister?" they echoed, head tipped to the side. Her heart fluttered. *Willowstar is my aunt?*

She nodded. "When she left, I spent many of her missing moons searching for her. Even when I was the only member of the search

parties, I searched. At the time, I was a Clan leader. I should not have neglected my Clan, but I loved her."

Myrtlekit's ears drooped, and she murmured agreement. Willowstar continued, "When I saw you, I knew she was gone. An unconscious part of me knew, but my heart didn't want to believe it until there was... there was proof. She was an incredible warrior. You remind me of Silverstreak, and it's comforting to know that her spirit lives on."

Willowstar heaved herself up to a sitting position. "If I know anything about Silverstreak, it's that she was a born warrior, from the breath in her lungs to the spark in her eye. I see that spark in you, as well. You're going to do wonderfully, Myrtlekit, and I'll be proud to name you a warrior when your time comes."

Tears threatened to fall from Myrtlekit's eyes. She pushed her head into Willowstar's shoulder, shoulders shaking. "Th-thank you," they choked out. "I'll do my best. I promise."

Willowstar swept her flowing tail comfortingly down Myrtlekit's back. "I know. Now, you should go get some sleep while you can. The sun rises in a few hours."

Myrtlekit nodded, staring down at her paws as they guided her down the Willow and back to the nursery. Her spot was as empty as she left it, and when they curled back in to rest, they were lulled by the faint purring of their denmates.

•~*~•

"Let all cats of FloodClan join beneath the Weeping Willow for a Clan meeting!" Willowstar's familiar call rang across the clearing. Myrtlekit's heart pounded in her chest, and she wondered if her denmates lined up next to her were as nervous as she was.

Earlier after sunrise, Plumrose had her litter all groomed to perfection. "Now sit down, and don't move, lest you mess up your fur!" she ordered, and so the three cats sat in the same spot until Willowstar made the call.

Sunkit, Poplarkit, and Kitekit were treated similarly, and Kitekit complained the whole time. Myrtlekit could hear the slight tremor in his voice, however, and she could sympathize.

As the Clan gathered, Hazelkit trotted over and sat down next to Myrtlekit at the edge of the line. She looked intimidating with her spiked fur sleeked back, like a bird of prey. A few tail-lengths from where Hazelkit padded sat the elder Troutrush. The ragged, battle-scarred old tom smiled proudly with his cloudy eyes half-closed. Despite the age that showed on his graying muzzle, he looked like the image of a perfect warrior.

Troutrush, Myrtlekit had learned, was Hazelkit's guardian. Hazelkit refused to explain anything beyond that, in regards to her family.

Sitting near the front of the crowd, just behind the kits, were their parents. Charapelt and Goldencrest practically glowing with pride, and Plumrose and Stormspill beside themselves with emotion (though, it didn't show on Stormspill's face.)

Glancing back, Myrtlekit startled when she caught Irispaw waving at them, mouthing a silent 'you can do it!' Myrtlekit looked away quickly. As they did, the ceremony began.

"FloodClan, we are gathered here today for perhaps the biggest apprenticeship ceremony in many moons," Willowstar announced. There was a scattering of excited murmurs from the crowd. She continued when they quieted.

"As such, I will be shortening the wording of the ceremony so that we aren't here for the rest of our lives." The Clan chuckled louder, and Willowstar smiled. "And with that, we will begin."

The regal molly dropped down from her perch and landed with a muffled *thump,* striding towards the seven kits lined up before her. Myrtlekit fretted that the entire Clan could see her trembling.

Willowstar cleared her throat, and recited the ceremonial words: "Young cats, you are gathered here today because you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you all to become apprentices. From now until you are named full warriors of

FloodClan, I name you: Kitepaw, Poplarpaw, Sunpaw, Pansypaw, Elderpaw, Myrtlepaw, and Hazelpaw."

She allowed the crowd a moment to cheer before continuing the ceremony:

"Kitepaw will be mentored by Toadthroat,

Poplarpaw by Martenbeard,

Sunpaw by Dewdaze,

Pansypaw by Storkwing,

Elderpaw by Rippleskip,

Myrtlepaw by Tundrapad,

and Hazelpaw by Cresspetal."

The named warriors lined up in front of their apprentices. There was a range of emotions in the eyes of the trainers and the trainees, and Myrtlepaw could practically feel the happiness pouring from Tundrapad in front of them.

"I trust that you warriors will pass on your many moons of knowledge and experience to these young cats, and that you will all learn from your apprentices as well."

At the same time, the apprentices pressed their noses to their mentors', and the crowd cheered. The meeting dispersed naturally, with each mentor taking their apprentice aside to formally introduce themselves. Pansypaw stared awkwardly at Storkwing, who smiled pleasantly as he spoke. Elderpaw and Rippleskip signed back and forth to one another, seeming to immediately meet on the same wavelength. Myrtlepaw met Tundrapad's glimmering blue eyes, and smiled shyly.

Tundrapad was hopping from one paw to another. "You know, I asked to mentor you!" she said with a smile. "I see a warrior in you just dying to claw their way out! I'll do my absolute best to teach you everything I know, but just know, little cat!" Tundrapad's blue

eyes narrowed playfully, "I will *not* go easy on you!"

Myrtlepaw's tall ears flicked. She pondered about how their training would work, with Myrtlepaw being nearly a head taller than her mentor. But, staring at Tundrapad again, they felt reassured by the muscles rippling beneath her coat and the confident way she held herself. A spark lit up in her chest.

I... I'm ready!

•~*~•

[image]

Poplarpaw (silver tabby, they/them) and Kitepaw (brown w/ white spots, he/him). art by me.

꩜ | FloodClan; Newleaf

[image]

ALLEGIANCES

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• **Leader** — Willowstar ; massive, silvery-blue, classic tabby molly with long, flowing fur and greenish-blue eyes. *(she/her)*

Apprentice: Irispaw

• **Deputy** — Rippleskip ; lanky white tom with marbled silver stripes and very pale blue eyes. *(they/he)*

Apprentice: Elderpaw

• **Medic** — Duckstem ; brown tortoiseshell molly speckled with tawny, black, and ginger spots and amber eyes. *(she/they)*

WARRIORS

• **Charapelt —** blue and ginger broken mackerel torbie molly with blue eyes. *(they/she)*

• **Cresspetal** — pale silver molly with teal eyes. *(she/her)*

Apprentice: Hazelpaw

• **Dewdaze** — dark gray molly with lighter specks and greenish-blue eyes. *(she/her)*

Apprentice: Sunpaw

• **Goldencrest** — large golden tom with a longer ridge of fur on his back, a scarred belly, and yellow-green eyes. *(he/him)*

• **Lotusglow** — fluffy albino molly with lavender-shaded eyes. *(they/she)*

• **Lushtail** — small, brown agouti molly with a long, fluffy tail and green eyes. *(she/her)*

• **Martenbeard** — dark cinnamon tabby tom with a lighter chin, chest, belly, and paws and amber eyes. *(he/him)*

Apprentice: Poplarpaw

• **Plumrose** — muscular red tabby molly with thick fur, folded ears, and brown eyes. *(she/her)*

• **Shellchime** — dilute cream tortoiseshell tom with a white chin and toes and pale hazel eyes. *(they/he)*

• **Storkwing** — big, fluffy, white tom with berry-stained paws and

yellow eyes. *(he/him)*

Apprentice: Pansypaw

• **Stormspill** — tall black tom with sleek fur and dark blue eyes. *(he/him)*

• **Toadthroat** — brown tabby tom with black and brown stripes and dark hazel eyes. *(he/him)*

Apprentice: Kitepaw

• **Tundrapad** — muscular white molly with gray tabby spots, shredded folded ears, and light blue eyes. *(she/her)*

Apprentice: Myrtlepaw

• **Voleshadow** — black and brown tortoiseshell cat with hazel eyes. *(they/them)*

APPRENTICES

• **Elderpaw**— tall black cat with sleek fur and dark blue eyes. *(they/she)*

• **Hazelpaw** — dark chocolate point molly with spiky fur, overgrown black claws, and hazel eyes. *(she/they)*

• **Irispaw—** large, fluffy, brown chocolate tabby with a white mane and paws and greenish-hazel eyes. *(she/her)*

• **Kitepaw**— small chocolate tom with a white crest and speckles, and light blue eyes. (he/him

• **Myrtlepaw** — very tall lavender clouded tabby with a white muzzle, legs, and tail tip, and odd yellow/green eyes. *(they/she)*

• **Pansypaw**— small, stocky molly with thick white fur, red tabby spots, red folded ears, and light blue eyes. *(she/her)*

• **Poplawpaw**— light gray broken mackerel tabby cat with dark green eyes. *(they/them)*

• **Sunpaw**— big, fluffy golden tom with blue eyes. *(he/him)*

QUEENS & KITS

n/a

ELDERS

• **Troutrush** — old, muscular, battle-scarred ruddy pointed tom with a graying face and blind milky-white eyes. *(he/him)*

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[image]

Rippleskip (they/he). art by me.

Chapter 7

When Myrtlepaw opened their eyes, everything was dark. The space around her was devoid of life, and the comforting scents of her denmates stale. With her silver tabby fur spiked in alarm, they lurched to their paws.

They were quickly brought back down when the low ceiling of the apprentices' made itself known. Myrtlepaw was dizzy with pain, rubbing her forehead furiously. *I made a point to tell myself to get up slowly!* she growled, allowing a moment to catch her breath before grooming her pelt flat. When they were done, they leaned back contentedly, before fully realizing that all of her denmates were gone. *I'm late! And on my first day!? What in the world is my problem!?*

She trotted outside of the den, housed snugly beneath the roots of a hanging willow tree. The lichen-and-moss curtain that draped across the entrance brushed her back, and Myrtlepaw made sure to tuck the curtain on a small branch so that the den could air out. They stared back into the den, anxiety making her heart ache. *My denmates are gonna think I'm stupid for sleeping in...*

Myrtlepaw slunk up the small slope that led to the den entrance, eyes darting back and forth. Over by the fresh-kill pile, the other apprentices were sharing a meal. She almost resolved to hide back behind the roots rather than show up, with all of those eyes on her. The thought made their skin crawl. But with a deep breath, Myrtlepaw forced herself into the clearing. *Duckstem and I worked so hard on my anxiety the past few moons! If she saw me now she'd be scolding me about hiding from my problems. Eating with my denmates* isn't *a problem. It's good.*

Pansypaw turned to her and offered a beaming smile. "Good morning!" she trilled, "We just barely left before you, so don't worry."

The small bit of consolation made Myrtlepaw's heart slow with

relief. She took up a spot next to Pansypaw, leaning into her plush white fur, and resting her cheek on their sister's head. Pansypaw growled, "You're too big to cuddle, Myrtle! I'm gonna be crushed!"

Myrtlepaw quickly shifted away, pelt prickling, but was relieved to see that Pansypaw's blue eyes glimmered humorously.

"You were sleeping so nicely that we didn't want to wake you up," Irispaw said apologetically, placing a big white paw on a dead Smallmouth bass, still dripping with river water. As Myrtlepaw made a move to pick it up, Irispaw brought it right to her, smiling kindly. "Th- thank you," Myrtlepaw mumbled, taking the bass in her own paws.

Irispaw purred a response before scooting back to her spot between Hazelpaw and Poplarpaw. Kitepaw rolled his dark blue eyes dramatically. "Tundrapad caught that *specifically* for you!" he sighed, "How come *you* got the best mentor? Toadthroat almost took me out before sunrise. Only stopped because Tundrapad said we needed to sleep!"

The young cats laughed, and Myrtlepaw smiled awkwardly before murmuring a short apology. As if on cue, Toadthroat growled. All the apprentices startled, Sunpaw hissing a quiet "Whoa!"

"We go out before sunrise so we can use the entire day to make you into a good warrior," he said coldly. "Good warriors don't gossip about their Clanmates!"

Kitepaw stared back indignantly and scoffed. Toadthroat was quick to cuff him over the ear with a dark paw, brown tabby fur raised. Myrtlepaw flinched back, and Sunpaw began to rise to his paws, eyes alight with anger. Before he could speak, Tundrapad made her way in front of Toadthroat, offering him a cold glare before warmly smiling at the apprentices.

"Today we'll be learning to swim!" she said, flicking her muzzle for the group to stand and follow. "Your mentors are waiting on the riverbed."

Myrtlepaw trailed behind the group, large ears lowered. The last

time she'd been in the river, it had tried to kill her. She shuddered at the memory of being mercilessly pulled through freezing, pitch dark rapids. Tundrapad nosed her shoulder comfortingly.

Myrtlepaw looked at the white and silver tabby. She didn't have to look down at her mentor because her head was already hanging, her face painted with a picture of dread.

The pair padded alongside one another and slid through the woven archway, the tall reeds and cattails that surrounded the entrance brushing their pelts. As they broke into the stretch of land right before the river, Tundrapad stopped. "I promise I wouldn't make you swim if I thought it was dangerous," she said. "The river changes with the seasons. There's no ice floating on it, and the water feels nice. It'll be fun!"

The apprentice nodded hesitantly, padding through a small sun-warmed wood. The trees around them were all shaped differently, from weeping willows to scrub oak trees. Lush undergrowth and fresh blooms decorated the land, which was alive with bees and birdsong.

The other mentors and their apprentices were waiting along the riverbank. Elderpaw already had their paws in the water, smiling softly. Rippleskip was doing the same. Dewdaze and Storkwing were chatting behind Sunpaw and Pansypaw, who were wrestling in the soft grass; clearly their mentors had decided it'd be too big a hassle to keep them separate. Poplarpaw, however, kept glancing anxiously to Kitepaw, who was sat farther away from the group next to Toadthroat. Martenbeard stroked his tail comfortingly along Poplarpaw's back.

Tundrapad *mrrp*ed a greeting to the other warriors, signaling for the apprentices to line up along the bank and sit facing them. Myrtlepaw sat down stiffly, the river babbling behind her. She was startled when her tail brushed into the water, which was pleasantly cool. Irispaw sat to her left, and Hazelpaw to her right. The latter had an unreadable expression; their expression always seemed angry.

When everyone was settled, Tundrapad began to speak. "Today,

we'll be teaching you all how to swim. As members of *Flood*Clan, I'm sure you're aware of how important this skill is for you to learn. But before we get started, we need to talk about water safety."

Cresspetal, Hazelpaw's mentor, spoke next. "We will be quizzing you about how much you know, but this isn't high stakes. Don't worry too much about getting a question wrong."

Myrtlepaw cringed inwardly. *A quiz? I didn't know apprenticeship included those!*

Dewdaze flicked her fluffy gray tail. "First question! What is the best way to swim across a river when the current is running fast? Irispaw, you answer."

"Diagonally, with the current." the brown and white tabby answered, "But you shouldn't swim alone if the river is running fast."

Dewdaze nodded with a smile. "Very good, yes. I like that you included the bit about swimming alone. No matter how skilled a swimmer you are, the river can be unpredictable and, at times, deadly."

The apprentices shifted slightly, fur raising along their spines. Myrtlepaw pulled her tail out of the water.

Now Martenbeard spoke: "What should you do if you find yourself sinking beneath the water? Pansypaw?"

Myrtlepaw glanced around to observe the area just outside of FloodClan camp. The river wound deeper into the trees, cutting the territory off from the meadow-side. Downstream, the bank of the river grew steeper and formed a gently-sloped ravine. Trees and dense foliage hung over the water and reflected green on its surface, and fish scales flashed temptingly beneath the current.

"Myrtlepaw? Answer the question," Toadthroat's call roused them from their trance, and heat flooded her pelt. *What was the question?* she fretted, staring wide-eyed at the dark brown tabby. His dark hazel eyes gleamed in annoyance.

"When the river floods, we clean out the dens and move everyone to FloodCamp," Irispaw answered for Myrtlepaw. She winked at the silver tabby, and Myrtlepaw almost fell over with relief.

Toadthroat growled. "Myrtlepaw can speak for herself. That is, if she can pay attention to the lesson." Their relief fizzled away into shame, and she looked at her paws. Suddenly they looked too big for her skinny legs, which were long and gangly. It didn't help that the fur on her legs was much shorter compared to the fur on her pelt. *I look stupid,* Myrtlepaw told herself, and felt distinctly like she wanted to fall into the river and never be seen again.

Again, Tundrapad silenced the tom with a frigid glare. When he looked away, she sniffed crossly. "Let's start swimming," she said, "I think someone needs to cool off."

Next to Myrtlepaw, Hazelpaw could barely stop herself from laughing. Kitepaw snickered as well. "Kitepaw!" Toadthroat snapped. "*Thank you* for volunteering to go first. Everyone, make some room so you can watch."

Kitepaw's eyes widened. He glanced fearfully at Poplarpaw before gingerly stepping into the water. "It's cold!" he hissed. Toadthroat sighed. "It isn't cold, you're just smaller and skinnier than a vole in leafbare! Walk in until your paws can barely touch the ground.

The brown and white tom shifted sideways into the water until it flowed over his shoulders. He grimaced, glancing at his mentor.

Toadthroat swam to his other side and supported Kitepaw's body with his forelegs. They moved into deeper water, and his mentor continued demonstrating.

"To stay afloat you have to paddle, kind of like how you run," he explained to the group. Kitepaw nodded and began to paddle his legs. When he got into a rhythm, Toadthroat removed his supporting forelegs, and suddenly Kitepaw was swimming. A grin splashed across his face, and his mentor nodded approvingly. "It'll come to you all pretty naturally. Soon enough, you're never gonna want to leave the river!"

The apprentices padded up to the bank, mentors following. Sunpaw laughed, "Kite, you look like an otter!" Kitepaw didn't respond, rolling his eyes and paddling towards the riverbank. He shook out his pelt right next to Sunpaw, thoroughly drenching the golden tom. "So do you," he smirked and darted away before Sunpaw could splash him back.

Myrtlepaw watched her denmates slip into the water, hesitating to watch at the bank.

Tundrapad splashed into the river and grinned at Myrtlepaw, "You're built perfectly for swimming," she said excitedly. "I'm sure your paws are webbed, so you're gonna be able to propel yourself super fast. Your coat's not gonna drag you down either, after all the fish you've eaten!"

Myrtlepaw trodded into the water. She was prepared enough for the temperature, but it was still shocking on her pads. Carefully, the silver tabby apprentice made their way far enough into the river that she was on her toes trying to keep her head above water.

Just as Toadthroat demonstrated, Tundrapad supported Myrtlepaw and slowly they moved into deeper water. Fear pierced Myrtlepaw's senses as she lost her grip on the pebbly river stones, and she paddled frantically.

"Slow down, fireball!" Tundrapad said. "You'll tire yourself out splashing like that. Move like you're walking."

With a deep breath, Myrtlepaw slowed her pace to an even rhythm. Water flowed coolly over her slick fur, and pushed back against her paws. It almost felt like walking on solid ground.

"Great job!" Tundrapad purred. She sounded... farther away. Myrtlepaw snapped her eyes open and was dismayed to find Tundrapad on the opposite bank. *I'm gonna sink!*

And sink she did. Under the water she felt frantic, clinging desperately to what Tundrapad had taught her. *Slow down, like walking.*

Myrtlepaw paddled strongly, feeling herself lift from the riverbed. *How far down am I?*

When she opened her eyes, she nearly gasped. It was beautiful down here, like a forest of its own. The riverbed looked like a walking path, dappled with warm-colored smooth stones. Vivid green foliage swayed with the current, like trees in the wind. Within the foliage, small fish darted back and forth. Myrtlepaw looked around, thrilled to find that she was surrounded by life. Fish gave her a wide berth as they swam downstream. A salamander wiggled by right in front of her nose. *My nose... I need air!*

Myrtlepaw struck out towards the sunlight, breaking the surface of the river and breathing in the fresh newleaf air. The water slid satisfyingly down their face, and Myrtlepaw found herself purring during the entire swim to the meadow.

Her fur was slick against her sides when she emerged, grinning uncontrollably. Tundrapad was tapping the ground with her paws, and did a little bounce. "I knew you could do it!"

The sodden tabby glanced at the opposite bank where the other apprentices stood, tails waving. "None of them have swam across yet," Tundrapad butted against Myrtlepaw's shoulder. "Except for Irispaw. She's been an apprentice longer than you, after all."

Water flowed silently around Myrtlepaw's ankles. "Can I swim back?" she blurted out. Tundrapad meowed her approval, and Myrtlepaw practically leapt back into the water. She cut across the river, this time keeping her head above the surface, and was greeted by her littermates on the other side.

A/N; hey readers! sorry it's been an actual year, i've been busy and tired and totally locked out of writing. so, as consolation, here's the 2025 cover for Gossamer, featuring Myrtlepaw (she/they) on the cover, drawn by me! thanks for reading!

[image]